

MICHIGAN FARM BUREAU WRITTEN TESTIMONY

MICHIGAN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 9, 2011

Thank you mister chair and members of the committee, my name is Matt Smego, Legislative Counsel for Michigan Farm Bureau, the state's largest general farm organization with over 47,000 farm family members. Along with me to day is Scott Piggott, the manager of our Agricultural Ecology Department.

Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today about the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program or MAEAP. As you know, Michigan Farm Bureau is driven by our grassroots policy development process that is fed by our farmer members through our 67 county Farm Bureaus.

Annually, members advance their policy concerns through county Policy Development Committees for consideration at their county Farm Bureau annual meetings. Once passed by members of the county Farm Bureaus, a committee of farmer members reviews over 900 policy submissions from the county Farm Bureaus to offer a collective policy proposal to the over 400 county Farm Bureau delegates at the Michigan Farm Bureau state annual convention. Each policy proposal is discussed and considered by delegates. The product of this process

becomes our policy book that guides the organization throughout the coming year.

Support for MAEAP as developed through our grassroots policy process is what has led to our continued effort to grow MAEAP on farms in partnership with many other state, federal, academic, conservation and agricultural organizations.

As stated by MFB policy:

- We support all farmers enrolling in and completing the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP).
- We believe that providing greater incentives will lead to more MAEAP verified farms and greater protection for Michigan's environment.
- We support funding for the MAEAP program, a very important voluntary program for Michigan farmers.
- To protect the environment and enhance production agriculture, we challenge state departments and federal agencies to work together to produce more user-friendly programs that provide clear direction and consistent regulatory authority on farms. Oversight of farms should be focused on solving problems and not simply on penalizing producers.

- We encourage all producers to use MAEAP verification as the base for projecting a positive farm image to the public and encourage the use of MAEAP in creating marketing opportunities for participants.

Michigan Farm Bureau continues to work with partners to implement these statements and to bring these policies to fruition.

As part of our organization's commitment to the program, our staff has provided leadership to the MAEAP partnership through over 10 years of chairmanship of the various committees that deliver MAEAP. At this time, I'll turn things over to Scott Piggott, Manager of our Agricultural Ecology Department.

Thank you, mister Chairman and members of the committee, for considering our thoughts regarding MAEAP. As Matt stated, Michigan Farm Bureau has been deeply involved in the development of MAEAP and an active participant in the partnership that has worked so hard to implement a program that is recognized as the national model for proactive, voluntary environmental programming on farms.

First, MDA did a great job of helping you to understand what MAEAP is, how it works, the good that it has done for farm management and the environment.

Second, I am very proud to have worked with many partners that have become trusted friends through my role as co-chairperson of the MAEAP program for the past 10 years. I have been blessed to work with great leaders in a program that has remained fixed on facilitating proactive environmental management on farms. With that said, I will do my best to offer our members perspective on the program that forged the policy statements offered in our testimony today.

The origin of MAEAP began as an “ask” from farmers. Regulation of farming activities began to grow considerably in the 1990’s and farmers recognized a need to meet environmental concerns on their own terms. People were showing up on farms saying “we’re from the government and we’re here to help you.”

The problem was that the people showing up were from different organizations and were all saying different things regarding environmental standards and practices. Eventually, voices were heard by State departments as DEQ and MDA worked collaboratively to sign the Agriculture Pollution Prevention Strategy in 1997. A major component to the strategy was development of a proactive, voluntary environmental assurance program for farmers. After some farmer focus groups, MAEAP was born as an agriculture-led initiative in 1999. Since that time, the partnership of state, federal, academic, conservation, agricultural and private partners has grown to over 50 organizations. Over the past 11 years,

the program has developed goals, bylaws, a formal partnership agreement, and a committee system to address existing and new environmental issues with committees meeting monthly. Along the way, the “plow has hit its share of rocks”, meaning that the partnership has addressed tough issues such as regulation changes for large livestock operations, confusion with high school test scores, setback rules from wells for farm practices, on-farm fuel storage, practices to determine if manure containment structures are working and determining when farms have lost their MAEAP verification. The last comment regarding loss of MAEAP verification is not an easy one as we believe ALL farms can and should become MAEAP verified. This sentiment is echoed in the DEQ Phosphorus Advisory Committee report that states “the goal should be 100% of farms becoming MAEAP verified.” To be clear, MAEAP is not for farms that knowingly violate environmental laws, but is accepting of all farms that meet the rigorous verification process. Through heated discussions on these issues, and sometimes laughter, the group has worked tirelessly to do as farmers asked, “to all say the same thing regarding environmental management on farms.”

With the structure and partnership in place, MAEAP has accomplished some amazing feats, but we recognize there is more to do. As I have the benefit of speaking after MDA’s presentation, you have already been given some of the

outcomes and strides the program has made throughout the years. Many states are attempting to build the partnership necessary to replicate MAEAP's success. The partnership is very proud of the recognition the program has received, particularly resolutions offered by the Michigan Legislature and being named as one of the top 300 cooperative conservation programs in the country by the White House at the 2005 White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation. In addition to recognition, MAEAP has boosted program recognition by offering Agriculture's Conference on the Environment every other year to farmers and MAEAP partners. The conference is the largest environmental conference for farmers in the country. We've been told by members that we will never fully understand the positive impact of the program's educational efforts and the benefits of the "coffee shop" talk the program has generated. Again, recognition is nice, but the partnership and farmers recognizes we have more work to do.

As MDA mentioned, over 10,000 farms have started the process to become MAEAP verified. Following Governor Snyder's lead of achieving outcomes, Agriculture today offers the following outcome for MAEAP: a 500% increase in MAEAP verified farms by 2015, representing 80% of Michigan's agricultural production area. Emboldened by Governor Snyder's support for the program as offered in his State of the State address, we believe that in concert with MAEAP

commodities on farms that generate the bulk of Michigan agriculture's farm gate production, MAEAP must prove that it is a stable program that provides value for the investment made by farmers. This value doesn't necessarily come in dollars, because plainly, Michigan is limited. This value can come in the form of certainty that if a farm is MAEAP verified, it will be recognized as performing its due diligence with respect to environmental management.

Working with partners they trust, like MDA and Conservation Districts, farmers continue to provide safe food and fiber in a way that protects the environment.

Farms rely on clean water for their families, crops and animals. Farmers care about the environment and appreciate being recognized as doing their part to keep our watersheds clean. MAEAP helps farmers to be proud of their conservation achievements; a pride that goes beyond the farm gate and into communities.

On behalf of our members, thank you for conducting this hearing as you learn more about MAEAP and take an active role in achieving the outcome of working with farmers to get more farms MAEAP verified.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.